**Making Connections: Using Wikis to Make Novels Relevant**

**Megan Bright – LIS 5260, Spring 2011**

**Slide 1:**

8th Grade Communication Arts

Grade Level Expectations:

R1 – Develop and apply skills and strategies to the reading process

R1H8 – Apply post-reading skills to demonstrate comprehension of text

R1I8 - Compare, contrast and analyze connections

R2 - Develop and apply skills and strategies to comprehend, analyze and evaluate fiction, poetry and drama from a variety of cultures and times

R3D8 - Read and follow multi-step directions to complete a complex task

W1A – Apply a writing process when composing text.

IL1 - Develop and apply effective research process skills to gather, analyze and evaluate information

**Slide 2:**

Traditional cycle of teaching novels. Vocabulary – Read – Write – Repeat. Ending with a test or project. Cycle has been around for so long because it worked. It teaches all of the parts of the novel, reinforces vocabulary, and tries keep kids engaged by using written discussion questions. So why doesn’t it work?

**Slide 3:**

Reading novels in class is difficult. It demands student attention for long periods. Have to appeal to all learning styles (auditory, visual, etc.).

\*\*Interactive\*\* So what normally happens in your classroom when students read novels as a class?

**Slide 4:**

Boredom – Look familiar? What happens when kids are bored?

\*\*Interactive\*\* - What happens when kids are bored?

See this image all the time

**Slide 5:**

One side affect of this boredom is a lack of comprehension. If students aren’t actually reading and having a dialogue with the text, THEY AREN’T LEARNING!

**Slide 6:**

So maybe your student is understanding what they’re reading, but they’re not focused. In the traditional model, we try to get kids back on track with a few comprehension questions or vocabulary exercises, but many still fail to actually focus on what they’re reading. We’ve all heard the expression that someone can’t see the forest through the trees. In this case, students can get so caught up in the words of the story that they miss the actual plot.

**Slide 7:**

So we put a lot of time and effort into planning novel units, only to get to the end and have students say, “Books are Boring.” As teachers, we know the book is great and teaches valuable lessons. But our kids fight the process, so why are we teaching novels again?

Because novels teach reading skills, elements of literature, problem solving, life lessons, and improve writing. If there is so much to gain, there HAS to be a better way to help them.

**Slide 8:**

As teachers, we know the best lessons are interactive, multi-modal, cooperative, and engaging. The best lessons are student-centered with the teacher serving as a facilitator instead of a director. The best lessons prepare students to enter the real world and extend far beyond the classroom walls. Does such a method really exist?

**Slide 9:**

I think it does and I think one of our greatest hopes in the future of teaching literature is the use of Wikis. The word Wiki comes from the Hawaiian word meaning “quick.” Wikis are easily editable web pages that allow a community of users to edit pages and add content. This means that students can dialogue with one another and work collaboratively to create a final product.

\*\* Interactive\*\* Raise your hands if you have any experience with wikis. Ask a few participants to share where they’ve encountered wikis before.

**Slide 10:**

One of the main features of Wikis is that they empower students to take control of their own learning. Teachers can serve as the classroom facilitators by posting daily tasks and observing student work. Students become responsible for their own learning and can begin to interact with the text of a novel in a different way. Instead of teachers dragging students along through the learning process, students and teachers begin to walk hand in hand. This year, I implemented a classroom wiki for the first time. I am so proud of the results! My students are excited to get to work each day and they are excited to see what other students are saying about their pages. I think the best way to show you the potential uses of a wiki are to walk through some of the pages my students have used and created.

**Slide 11:**

When using Wikis in conjunction with novels, there are two key components – the teacher component and the student component. As a part of the teacher component, teachers have the ability to use the wiki as a place to compile resources and information for students. For example, teachers can provide links to videos, websites, maps, and documents. This can provide an entirely new background and context for novels – taking them out of the confines of a book and placing into the relevance of the world.

**Slide 12:**

Here is an example of my teacher hub. You can see that on the home page of my wiki there are several tasks for students to complete, but this is also a place where I can post resources to help my students. In my case, students are reading the book *Across Five Aprils* by Irene Hunt. As you see, I have included an image of the civil war, but it is also easy to embed videos from sites like TeacherTube. In *Across Five Aprils*, several key locations are mentioned in relationship to the Civil War. So I have embedded a Google Map onto my homepage that shows the key locations of the book. When students click on each of the blue map points, they can learn more information about the location.

**Slide 13:**

Within the student component of the wiki, there are several options. One option is to create individual student pages where students can dialogue about the text. Students can journal freely about their thoughts, respond to teacher prompts, or embed projects created using other online tools such as Animoto. Here is an example of a student page from my class. You can see that the student has created a table to record a KWL chart where they record information they know, want to know, and learn throughout the book. They have also created a list of characters and responded to several discussion questions.

**Slide 14:**

The second option allows for student collaboration. Because wiki pages are editable by all members of the wiki, students can engage in an online dialogue with one another. Students can comment on the thoughts of other students, or work together on a collaborative assignment. On this slide, you can see an example of a collaborative project I have used with my students. Before reading *Across Five Aprils*, I wanted students to gain some context and perspective about the Civil War. I divided students into three groups and each group was given a specific category of information on which to research. Students worked together to research aspects of their category and simultaneously added their information to the class wiki page – working together to create a glossary of people and locations that will be mentioned later in the novel.

**Slide 15:**

In addition to working on collaborative projects, students can also write and comment on the work of other students. Here, you can see a comment that one of my students left. The original posting says, “I think the effect of the slow pace of communication in the 1860’s on the actual development of the Civil war is that it slowed down the advancement of the war. Once a Battle happened, it took a long time to get the news to everyone so it took a long time to find out who won. Also, no one in far away states new the war had started until at lesat a couple of days after the first battle. The slow communication also made it heard for people to know what was happening as soon as it happened. Another effect of all of this was that people became bold and made boasting remarks and such about them winning, only to find out later that their side had actually lost. For example, if Missouri declared war on Kansas, it might take a couple days for ALL of the state to know that it was war.”

The comment says, “I agree because the communication was very slow and knowing a battle had happened and you are at war is something you would probably want to know. Well, I know you would want to know if a battle were going on. You also need to know what side is winning so maybe you could help with supplies or something. I mean, say your son […] was in the military. You would definitely want to know if he was safe! I love your answer, though. It’s very good and interestingly opinionated.”

By having students respond to one another, I can see how well each of them is understanding the story. This also gives an opportunity for students to give feedback on the writing of others. So far, this has worked out well in my classroom.

**Slide 16:**

In addition to being easy to use, Wikis are easy to adapt to differentiate instruction. Teachers can easily provide instructions for different tasks that are differentiated to provide additional support for struggling learners or additional challenges for advanced students. Teachers can easily link the wiki to videos or gaming sites to provide remediation for struggling students. Similarly, teachers can link to media creation sites like Animoto or Glogster and have advanced students create and embed their own work onto the wiki.

In addition to reaching diverse populations, teachers can also address all levels of Depth of Knowledge while using the wiki. Being able to help students become critical thinkers is an amazing tool.

**Slide 17:**

The nice thing about using an online Wiki service such as Wikispaces is that you don’t have to be technologically savvy. Wikispaces is easy to set up and easy to edit. If you encounter problems along the way, a helpdesk is available. Students can be taught how to create and edit their wiki pages easily during a class period. In addition, Wikispaces allows you to create an educator account that gives you the ability to create up to 100 student accounts without the need for email addresses. This is a major benefit for school districts who have yet to agree to student email.

**Slide 18:**

Even thought Wikis are easy to use, I can imagine that some of you are a little overwhelmed by the thought of completely overhauling your novel units. What I want to make sure you realize is that you’re not overhauling them – you’re adapting them. Many of the discussion questions and activities you used to do will still work and could work well in a Wiki. It is easy to transform the traditional model into a wiki that is engaging and exciting. Before we even started our classroom wiki lessons, kids said they were excited because they would get to use the computers, it was something they hadn’t tried before, and it was something that was pretty exclusive – no one else in my building had ever tried it before.

\*\*Interactive\*\* Turn to one of your neighbors and share an idea of a way that you could see yourself using wikis in your classroom.

**Slide 19:**

Even though using wikis in my classroom is a fairly new experience, I have learned some lessons. 1. Make sure students know that you can see who is editing each page. This eliminates any attempts they may make to mess with another student’s work. 2. Tell parents about the wiki experience. Provide them with a link to the page. They love to see how their students are doing and they are quick to support you if students slack off. 3. Build in extra time. Even though I think students would be able to answer questions quickly, they take a little longer than I expect each day. Make sure you allow enough time for them to really think about the answers they provide. Rushing them does no good for anyone.

**Slide 20:**

Even though the majority of the work my students do on their wiki pages is individual, there is a new element of accountability in the mix when they know that other students can view their pages. Occasionally, I will pair students up and ask them to respond to one another. Knowing that another student is depending on their work to be finished has helped motivate some of my stragglers. They are quick to encourage one another and motivate them to get the work finished.

**Slide 21:**

I think one of the most important aspects of using Wikis in my classroom is that this is preparing them for the future. Even my students who are not college-bound will encounter programs like Blackboard and Moodle at the high school. Being able to work online and collaborate with other students is a life skill. In addition – it eliminates the paperwork that I had become so accustomed to hauling home each night. All student work is online and can be accessed from anywhere. Students don’t forget their work at school, and I don’t forget their papers at home. It is a win-win situation.

**Slide 22:**

While I can tell you that Wikis are great with Novels, they don’t have to be limited. Please, feel free to encourage other teachers to create wikis for a variety of purposes. Students could use them to journal, keep lab notes, goal setting, and many other ways! The sky is the limit.

**Slide 23:**

While I have chosen to use Wikispaces.com, that is NOT the only wiki site. Please feel free to check out these other free wiki sites as well and choose the site that works best for you and your classroom.

Wikispaces.com

Pbworks.com

Wiki.zoho.com

**Slide 24:**

I want to leave you today with some of the comments that my students have made regarding their excitement over using wikis in our classroom.

“Comm. Arts is even better with hands-on computer stuff.”

“I am excited because we will get to discuss it with other students, which means I will understand it better.”

“We will save trees by not using paper.”

“It looks cool to see my thoughts on the internet.”

As you can see, they are enthusiastic, and engaged. I couldn’t have asked for a better experience. If there is anything I can do to help you have a successful wiki experience, please let me know!